AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Claim 1. (Currently amended) A method for ~~plant micropropagation and/or storage of germplasm~~obtaining leafy galls or shoot outgrowths as the starting material for micropropagation of plants, comprising the steps of:

(a) contacting plant material with a microorganism that induces fasciation ~~and/or one or more fasciation inducing factors derived from the microorgansim or derived from the infected and/or fasciated tissue~~;

(b) developing leafy galls or shoot ~~outgrows~~outgrowths on the plant material; and

(c) isolating the leafy galls or shoot ~~outgrows~~outgrowths as ~~the~~ a starting material for micropropagation of plants,

wherein the plant material is chosen from the group consisting of intact plants, leaf discs, organs, tissue fragments, seedlings, seeds, embryos, isolated cells, protoplasts, cell cultures and callus tissues.

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Claim 2. (Currently amended) The method ~~for plant micropropagation and/or storage of germplasm~~ of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

(d) eliminating or inactivating the microorganism that induces fasciation ~~and/or the one or more fasciation related factors derived from the microorganism or derived from the infected and/or fasciated tissue~~;

(e) culturing the leafy gall or shoot ~~outgrows~~outgrowths in or on one or more suitable culture media to allow shoot and root development for obtaining plantlets; and

(f) transferring the plantlets thus obtained, to conventional growing conditions to obtain regenerated plants.

Claim 3. (Currently amended) The method ~~for plant micropropagation and/or storage of germplasm~~ of claim 1, further comprising the step of storing the leafy galls or shoot ~~outgrows~~outgrowths under growth limiting conditions.

Claim 4. (Previously amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the fasciation-inducing microorganism is *Rhodococcus fascians*.

Claim 5. (Cancelled) The method of claim 3, wherein the growth limiting conditions comprise temperatures of about 4 ^{0}C or less or or wherein the growth limiting conditions comprise storage in liquid nitrogen.

Claim 6. (Cancelled) The method of claim 1, wherein the plant material is selected from the group consisting of: leaf discs, organs, tissue fragments, seedlings, seeds, embryos, isolated cells, protoplasts, cell cultures and callus tissues.

Claim 7. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the plant material is material of species of ~~the genera~~families selected from the group consisting of: *Brassicaceae, Salicaceae, Compositae, Solanaceae, Scrophulariaceae, Liliaceae, Papaveraceae, Gramineae* and *Fabaceae.*

Claim 8. (Cancelled) The method for the plant micropropagation and/or storage of germplasm of claim 3 further comprising:

removing or inactivating microorganisms still present that induce fasciation and/or removing or inactivating fasciation related factors derived from the microorganism or derived from the infected and/or fasciated tissue,

culturing the leafy gall or shoot outgrows in or on one or more suitable culture media to induce shoot and root development for obtaining plantlets, and

transferring the plantlets thus obtained, to conventional growing conditions to obtain regenerated plants.

Claim 9. (Previously added) The method of claim 2 wherein the plantlets are acclimatized before conventional growing conditions to obtain regenerated plants.

Claim 10. (Cancelled) The method of claim 8 wherein the plantlets are acclimatized before conventional growing conditions to obtain regenerated plants.

Claim 11. (New) A method for isolation of leafy galls or shoot outgrowths for starting materials for micropropagation of plants comprising the steps of:

(a) contacting plant material with one or more fasciation-inducing factors;

(b) developing leafy galls or shoot outgrowths on the plant materials; and

(c) isolating the leafy galls or shoot outgrowths as the starting materials for micropropagation of plants,

wherein the fasciation-inducing factors comprise at least the *fas* products, the *att* products, other gene products encoded by the pFiD188 plasmid or combinations thereof.

Claim 12. (New) The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:

(d) eliminating or inactivating the one or more fasciation-related factors;

(e) culturing the leafy gall or shoot outgrowths in or on one or more suitable culture media to allow shoot and root development for obtaining plantlets; and

(f) transferring the plantlets thus obtained to conventional growing conditions to obtain regenerated plants.

Claim 13. (New) The method of claim 11, wherein the fasciation-related factors are derived from a microorganism that induces fasciation or derived from the infected and/or fasciated tissue.

Claim 14. (New) The method of claim 11, wherein the fasciation-related factors are derived from *Rhodococcus fascians*.

B3 Claim 15. (New) The method of claim 12, wherein the fasciation-related factors are derived from a microorganism that induces fasciation or derived from the infected and/or fasciated tissue.

Claim 16. (New) The method of claim 12, wherein the fasciation-related factors are derived from *Rhodococcus fascians*.

Claim 17. (New) A method for preservation of plants or germplasm, comprising the steps of:

(a) contacting plant material with a microorganism that induces fasciation and/or with one or more fasciation-inducing factors;

(b) developing leafy galls or shoot outgrowths on the plant material;

(c) isolating the leafy galls or shoot outgrowths; and

(d) storing the leafy galls or shoot outgrowths under growth limiting conditions for preservation of plants or germplasm,

wherein the plant material is selected from the group consisting of intact plants, leaf discs, organs, tissue fragments, seedlings, seeds, embryos, isolated cells, protoplasts, cell cultures, and callus tissues and that the fasciation-inducing factors comprise at least the *fas* products, the *att* products, other gene products encoded by the pFiD188 plasmid, or combinations thereof.

Claim 18. (New) The method of claim 17, wherein the growth limiting conditions comprise temperatures of about 4 ^{0}C or less or wherein the growth limiting conditions comprise storage in liquid nitrogen.

Claim 19. (New) The method of claim 17, wherein the fasciation-inducing microorganism is *Rhodococcus fascians*.

Claim 20. (New) The method of claim 17 further comprising the steps of:

(e) removing or inactivating microorganisms still present that induce fasciation and/or removing or inactivating fasciation related factors derived from the microorganism or derived from the infected and/or fasciated tissue;

(f) culturing the leafy gall or shoot outgrowths in or on one or more suitable culture media to induce shoot and root development for obtaining plantlets; and

(g) transferring the plants thus obtained to conventional growing conditions to obtain regenerated plants.

Claim 21. (New) The method of claim 18, wherein the fasciation-inducing microorganism is *Rhodococcus fascians*.

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Claim 22. (New) The method of claim 18 further comprising the steps of:

(e) removing or inactivating microorganisms still present that induce fasciation and/or removing or inactivating fasciation related factors derived from the microorganism or derived from the infected and/or fasciated tissue;

(f) culturing the leafy gall or shoot outgrowths in or on one or more suitable culture media to induce shoot and root development for obtaining plantlets; and

(g) transferring the plants thus obtained to conventional growing conditions to obtain regenerated plants.

Claim 23. (New) The method of claim 20, wherein the plantlets are acclimatized before conventional growing conditions to obtain regenerated plants.

Claim 24. (New) The method of claim 22, wherein the plantlets are acclimatized before conventional growing conditions to obtain regenerated plants.

Claim 25. (New) The method of claim 2, wherein the fasciation-inducing microorganism is *Rhodococcus fascians*.